

Donald Trump Is not a Shameless Toddler:

The Problems with Psychological Analyses of the 45th US President

Jill Locke

Krisis 39 (1): 37-45.

Abstract

This essay critically analyzes two dominant narratives that explain and lament the rise of Donald Trump in the United States. First, I extend Jill Locke's (2016) concept of "The Lament that Shame is Dead" to show the limitations of criticizing Trump in terms of the "death of shame." I then turn my attention to the problems inherent in recent characterizations of Trump as a petulant child. Drawing from Locke (2016) on shame and Freud (1914) and Lee Edelman (2004) on the politics of "the child," I argue that characterizing Trump as shameless, childish, or as a shameless child only affirms, rather than deposes, Trump's right-wing populist strategy and keeps the focus on him as a personality rather than on the broader social and political context in which he emerged. I argue this has implications for the rise of right-wing populism in the West, more broadly.

Keywords

Donald Trump, Shame, Shameless, Child, Populism

Licence

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons License (Attribution Non Commercial 3.0) (CC BY-NC 3.0). © 2019 The author(s).

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.21827/krisis.39.1.37196>

Donald Trump is not a Shameless Toddler: The Problems with Psychological Analyses of the 45th US President

Jill Locke

I have the most loyal people [...] I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters, OK? It's, like, incredible.

— Donald Trump, campaigning in the US presidential primary

The child shall have things better than his parents: he shall not be subject to the necessities which they have recognized as dominating life. Illness, death, renunciation of enjoyment, restrictions on his own will, shall not touch him; the laws of nature, like those of society, are to be abrogated in his favor; he is really to be the center and heart of creation, “His Majesty the Baby,” as we once fancied ourselves to be.

— Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism”

Trump has taught us that shame performs a vital democratic function – and how dangerous is the man who feels none of it.

— Jonathan Freeland, writing in *The Guardian*

Two Laments in the Age of Trump

As a scholar of shame and democracy, I cannot help but be struck by the degree to which Trump's critics have described him as shameless. This characterization began during the primary campaign, continued through the general election, and has only persisted since his inauguration in January 2017. Trump, so this line of reasoning goes, has no regard for the basic norms of human conduct. He lacks any self-awareness or self-scrutiny. He seems beyond embarrassment, as if the only moral and social compass he follows is his own, which is nestled deep in the recesses of his “authentic” self where it remains immune to “false” and “external” ideas about what is appropriate and inappropriate, shameful or uncivil.

In my most recent (2016) work on shame, I have traced a history of a phenomenon I call The Lament that Shame is Dead, a nostalgic and recurring account of how people have lost their presumably once-secure sense of shame and will therefore be unable to live together under civil terms. (Locke 2016). This lament often presents itself in modernity, as it characterizes individualism as having supplanted a historical regard for others and the community. But the fear of shamelessness and the belief that shame can be undone also existed in ancient Greece. An often-quoted line in work on shame is from Plato's *Protagoras*: “shame and justice are needed for people to live [together] in cities” (Plato 2009, 322d). Political theorist Arlene Saxonhouse opens up her book on Athenian *parrhesia*, the Greek practice of frank and open speech, with this passage. Saxonhouse argues that we must have shame to check *parrhesia* and bind each other to the polis. She argues that shame has always had a precarious relationship to democracy, but that it must be preserved as a coherent censorial force in order for people to share the world with each other. Her book thus functions as a contemporary lament that shame is dead as she looks back to the Greeks as better understanding the essential role shame needed to play than we do in late-modernity (Saxonhouse 2006).

In the first chapter of my book, *Democracy and the Death of Shame*, I provide an extended tracing of the various iterations of The Lament from political theorists and philosophers to journalists, judges, sheriffs, lawmakers, and ordinary citizens. Their common refrain is that “we” have lost the capacity to live together because we no longer share some sense of common values or social expectations that would govern our lives. This loss of common values means we cannot feel shame or embarrassment for the same kind of actions; some argue we have lost the capacity to feel shame and embarrassment at all. I won't rehearse all of these manifestations of The Lament (that Shame is Dead) here, but suffice it to summarize the phenomenon of The Lament as a nostalgic story of an imagined past in which shame regulated and secured social life. I argue that The Lament is actually a disciplinary and shaming device in its own right that positions some people as legitimate defenders of the social order and others as insurgent outsiders who lie “beyond the pale.” Against this view of shame as needing to be enforced and secured for the sake of civilization, I consider how practices of “unashamed citizenship” can actually bolster

the practices essential to democratic life.

Given my skepticism about calls to “bring shame back,” the much-discussed shamelessness of Donald Trump presents a hard case. In fact, several friends and colleagues have written to me about Trump’s shamelessness, noting that it calls me to rethink whether longings for shame perform the regressive and inequalitarian work I have attributed to them. Are investments in shame correctives to the unruliness and incivility of politics and public life necessarily misplaced? Can they do more than target, pathologize, and conceal – as I have argued they tend to do – the voices of people claiming democratic space for themselves for the very first time? Trump, and the rest of the world, so this line of thinking goes, would be less dangerous, and it would be better for the US and the rest of the world if Trump had a healthy sense of shame. (By shame I mean a felt ethic of obligation and regulation that involves an actual or internalized audience that judges one’s thoughts and acts in terms of their relationship to norms or standards that one shares -- or is expected to share -- with others). Shame thus involves a social script, the departure from which occasions a set of negative feelings about oneself – feelings that most people seek to avoid. It is also corporeal – felt as the red on the face and ache in the gut. It is much deeper and more self-lacerating than embarrassment, the transient blush that occurs when one does something outside of social expectations. (See Locke 2016, 19).

Shame, in this sense, would mean a regulative brake that limits and restricts one’s ability to pursue ego-driven self-interest. It is similar to Freud’s characterization of conscience, that “special institution in the mind [that] ... constantly watches the real ego” (Freud 1952, 408). Shame, by this account, would provide a horizon for Trump’s unfettered willfulness, humbling him and making him more aware that people cannot share the world and power within it without self-regulation and self-correction. (See Carroll 2017). His notorious penchant for tyrannical acts at the personal and political level suggests that he has no internal regulator, or if he does it does not correspond to the regulators with which “the rest of us” operate. Trump’s ostensibly shameless acts do nothing to advance the common good or invigorate democracy; they only isolate people from each other and leave us feeling

powerless because we cannot discern the terms of his politics or the rules governing it.

A second and related lament in the Trump era warrants consideration. This second lament goes something like the following: Trump is a child who is unfit to govern because he lacks the basic norms of adult behavior. That is to say, Trump is a child, a toddler, a baby who is so impulsive that he cannot be trusted with the presidency. Here, too, a discourse of shame is present. Part of what makes early childhood distinctive is children’s lack of awareness or self-consciousness about their bodies and actions. They are beyond embarrassment, and this is what endears them to us even as we may find some of it revolting (e.g., the absence of bathroom habits, and so on). Rousseau, of course, famously idealizes this early stage of development and the natural goodness (*l’amour de soi*) that governed it (Rousseau 1979). Whole movements in democratic education and modern popular psychology have emphasized the Rousseauian desire to preserve childhood as long as possible and, even in adulthood, to care for one’s “inner child.” But it has a darker side, as the child’s anti-sociality can lord itself over the parents, and adult lives can be surrendered to the child’s tyranny.

Just as theorists of shame have illuminated ambivalences about shame and its relationship to democratic citizenship and politics, so too have scholars in both queer studies and childhood studies emphasized the varying political and social ends toward which the “child” can be mobilized. Much of this work emphasizes the social and historical construction of childhood as an idea about both petulance and innocence rather than an actual temporal state, hence the ability to insult a grown man like Trump by calling him a “child” (de Schweinitz 2011, Edelman 2004, Stockton 2009).

These twin laments relate to each other and to my ongoing research on shame and democratic citizenship as well as my current interest in the figure of the child in politics and political theory. This essay begins to unpack their significance for how we think about the relationship between democratic citizenship and opposition to anti-democratic movements and their leadership. Ultimately, I argue that both

laments overly psychologize Donald Trump and in so doing de-politicize and de-historicize him. That is to say, by attributing the problems of Trump's America to Trump's shamelessness or his childishness, they deflect attention away from the social, cultural, and material conditions on the ground in the US that put Trump in power.

Lament I: The Lament that Shame is Dead

First, I want to map out in more detail the phenomenon I call The Lament that Shame is Dead. The Lament (as I will refer to it) is a nostalgic story about how a cult of authenticity and self-aggrandizement in which individuals' own feelings about themselves, and how they can satisfy their drives and pleasures, override and displace an imagined past wherein self-restraint and the capacity for negative self-assessment reigned and functioned as a check and limit against our baser human tendencies.

Democracy and the Death of Shame uses four case studies to make this point, but I am going to begin by looking at the one case that is most relevant for my discussion of Donald Trump and, potentially, other right-wing leaders who exploit populist discourse and proudly display shamelessness and being unashamed of their bigotry. Specifically, I will briefly sketch my third case (found in chapter 4), de Tocqueville's nostalgia for the American founding aristocracy and his anxiety about the crass and violent future embodied in the election of President Andrew Jackson. Given that Trump idealizes Jackson and has his portrait in the Oval Office, this example is especially apt for the current query.

In de Tocqueville's account of America - which became canonized in the US as an actual description of life on the ground rather than a touchstone for theorizing about French political and social culture - increasing equality in the "social" arena, rather than the strictly "political", marked all aspects of 1831 American life. This was evident in ideas about, and habits around, among other things, Anglo-American girls' and women's dating and marriage, the "relaxing of the social bond" in

relationships between husbands and wives and parents and children, and the generally convivial social relationships that cut across social class in New England towns (de Tocqueville 2003). Although de Tocqueville and his companion Gustave de Beaumont arrived in America to study American prisons for the French government, they ended up writing about Anglo-Americans' broader social habits and their relationships to democratic political institutions, which interested them because they suggested how French democracy, also born in a late eighteenth-century revolution, but with less stability, might also "grow up" (Janara 2002). (Here, the nation itself is the child).

While de Tocqueville acknowledges some of the pleasures of democratizing social life, specifically with respect to the softening of the social bond between parents and children who can relate to each other more as friends than as master and subject, he also expresses alarm and concern about the loss of a properly educated and well-bred ruling class. This concern crystallizes in his account of the populist rule by Jackson. De Tocqueville's lamentations about this loss in America mirrored the concerns raised by the American founding class, which symbolically died when Jackson beat John Quincy Adams in the 1828 election (Locke 2016, 105-106). De Tocqueville worried that although the elite class opposed Jackson, "the people" clung to him as their demagogue. He writes: "Since I have been in America, I have almost got proof that all the enlightened classes are opposed to General Jackson, but the people holds to him and he has numbers in his favor" (de Tocqueville 1959, 106). As far as de Tocqueville could tell, a President Jackson would jeopardize the mores that democracy needed and shame secured.

Indeed, it is tempting to share de Tocqueville's account of Jackson as the shameless and morally bankrupt genocidal maniac against the cool, rational, and civil aristocratic class that he laid to rest. The Jackson presidency involved a fully-developed campaign against American Indians and a ferocious slave trade, which Jackson participated in. He eschewed books and ideas and instead proved himself on the battlefield. While these intellectual differences hold fast when comparing Jackson with de Tocqueville's preferred candidate, the world-traveling and French speaking John Quincy Adams, who often accompanied his father on foreign missions when he

was Secretary of State (Remini 2002, 11-16), it is unfair to locate Indian genocide and slave-trading solely in the lap of the “new arrival.” One of John Quincy’s most sympathetic biographers notes that although he described (in 1841) the mass deaths of American Indians as one of the “heinous sins of the nation,” this view came late in life. For most of Adams’s professional life, he held the same view as Jackson with respect to Indians and the need to destroy them for the sake of Anglo-American progress and expansion. At the end of the War of 1812, Adams understood “extermination of all Indian rights [as] a national duty”; as secretary of state, Adams defended Jackson’s invasion of Florida (Spain) and the “execution of Indian prisoners without trial” as sound measures against the “barbarities of the Indians.” Even at the end of his life, he remained committed to natural conquest, “white power,” and the “inevitable expansion of Anglo-Saxon civilization” (Parsons 1973, 339-340).

Moreover, the Adams campaign’s attacks on Jackson during the presidential elections (of 1824 and 1828) were exercises in shaming and humiliation that focused on his poor, Southern breeding and the fact that his wife, Rachel, smoked a pipe and had never been formally divorced (though the couple had sued for divorce in civil court) from her abusive first husband. Just as Rachel Jackson was pathologized for not being sufficiently feminine, the Adams campaign also attacked her for not really being “white.” The moral crimes John Quincy and his allies feared were not genocide and slavery, but a threat to the founders’ codes of race, gender, and social class (Parsons 2011, 143-144). Hence the shame that the ruling class wanted to preserve was one that guaranteed a particular racial and social order.

The Lament that Shame is Dead, then, is a narrative of civilization in decline that projects an image of a just and orderly past in which the emotion of shame regulated social and political life. It functions as a shaming practice in its own right as it decries insurgent citizens as unassimilable and “beyond the pale.” My study recounts how, during times of popular democratic transition, as the Jacksonian era in the early US was, legitimate moral and political problems are pinned on democratic “new arrivals” rather than the established ruling class. Lamenting Andrew Jackson’s shamelessness propped up a vision of the aristocratic founders as morally

upright and beyond rebuke rather than agents of genocide, enslavement, and counter-venture themselves. In so doing, The Lament also pathologizes the legitimately democratic and egalitarian moments of the 1830s that made possible Jackson’s presidency, his wife’s separation from her abusive husband, and the disruption of gender norms associated with the Jacksons themselves.

Trump’s Shamelessness

Like Andrew Jackson, whom he explicitly admires for his rogue and populist appeal, Donald Trump has been frequently characterized as being shameless and without restraint or regard for others or the agreed-upon codes of social conduct that make life together possible. Journalist Steven Ivory wrote after the August 2017 white nationalist march in Charlottesville, Virginia, which Trump defended in part: “If Donald Trump were a comic book villain, his superpower would be the complete and utter immunity to shame” (Ivory 2017). This can be extended to the US voters who elected him and continue to support his presidency, as well as the media that have not held him accountable for his actions (Taylor 2016). More generally, the nation itself could be said to lack shame so long as Donald Trump is the President. The Lament reads the Trump Presidency as evidence that shame is, at long last, finally dead in the United States.

The characterization of Trump as out of step with recent and historical norms of conduct is not particularly controversial. A recent *New York Times* editorial, for example, outlined the contrast between conservative criticisms of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama and the way that Donald Trump has flouted both sartorial and diplomatic conventions that conservatives have historically upheld (New York Times 2017).

But the Jackson case reminds us to ask what the focus on shamelessness in Trump and his voters *conceals* about the dynamics of his administration vis-à-vis the norms and habits that we might conscript (via shame) to regulate. In other words, making the problem about Trump’s (and his supporters’) character deficits and

psychological pathologies, because they are allegedly not beholden to shared norms that would induce shame or negative self-assessment, gets in the way of analyzing how the “Trump effect” also perpetuates and reinforces already-existing values in US politics and culture. This echoes what Jeanne Morefield describes as the imperial “politics of deflection” i.e., “this is not who we are” (Morefield 2014). There are too many examples of Trump behavior characterized as shameless to recount here, but in addition to his refusal to denounce the white nationalist march in Charlottesville, they include his response to the devastation brought to Puerto Rico by 2017 Hurricane Maria and his notorious “grab ‘em by the pussy” comments that were caught on tape in 2005. The presence of white power in the US, which escalated during the presidency of Barack Obama, the colonial maltreatment of Puerto Rico, and a Hollywood culture of sexual exploitation (now materializing with Harvey Weinstein) did not begin with Donald Trump. He is, in many ways, the *effect* of these values. He then sees himself as their rightful inheritor and embraces them baldly and shamelessly. My point is not that we should embrace Trump or not hold him accountable. The point is that fixating on Trump’s particular personality disorders also conveniently masks the ways in which his “shameless” ignorance, disregard, and harassment is part and parcel of economies and histories long in the making.

Moreover, there are significant numbers of commentators who suggest that Trump’s voters, if not the man himself, are not really without shame. Rather, they feel shame and humiliation as a result of their lost status in a country that increasingly claims to value diversity and inclusion at the same time that it has de-stabilized and exported its manufacturing base, thus compromising the jobs of many people in the so-called “white working class.” (See Coates 2017). Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor of *Tikkun*, writes: “working people’s stress is often intensified by shame at their failure to ‘make it’ in what they are taught is a meritocratic American economy....Instead of challenging this ideology of shame, the left has buttressed it by blaming white people as a whole for slavery, genocide of the Native Americans and a host of other sins, as though whiteness itself was something about which people ought to be ashamed. The rage many white working-class people feel in response is rooted in the sense that once again, as has happened to them

throughout their lives, they are being misunderstood” (Lerner 2016). Leaving aside the question for now of whether or not whites should be ashamed of whiteness, read as white supremacy and not a generic cultural trait of Anglos and Europeans, and whether or not working class whites ought to feel ashamed for having to share the world with people of color, the point is that many Trump voters appear to feel deep shame for their failure to live up to the American promise of independent wage-earning and civic belonging. Rather than interrogate the terms of this promise, who receives it, and what are the socio-economic conditions that leave it unmet, they look to place the blame on other victims of socio-economic violence. Trump provides the perfect script – immigrants and women have stolen the white working class [man’s] rightful place as head of household and foreman on the factory floor. Trump’s popularity with wealthy white Americans also suggests that they, too, might feel shame for having to share seats in elite business schools and corporate boards with immigrants and people of color. One could say they should not feel ashamed for lost status because they still have immense social and political power, but shame is not reasonable in that way.

Indeed, for all we know Trump himself may in fact feel deep shame for having failed to live up to the status he inherited. He is far from a member of an insurgent working or middle class (as Andrew Jackson was), but he has nonetheless positioned himself as the spokesperson of those who are (even as he serves the interest of an oligarchy). He is also an outsider to electoral politics. I have suggested in my work that all of the mockery of Jackson had to have an effect on his sense of self, and that perhaps that shame fueled rather than abated his genocidal longings as he tried to speak in the “civilizing” tongue of the founders. Michael Warner reminds us, “the first thing we do with our shame is pin it on someone else” (Warner 1999, 3). If Trump is the narcissist many have claimed, that does not mean he is without shame; to the contrary, narcissism can be a defense against shame (Burgo 2012). Our own feelings of inadequacy and incompetence can become, as Adam Haslett has noted, “weaponized” against others (Haslett 2016). It’s not at all clear how “bringing shame back” disables the Trump regime and the threats it poses.

Lament II: Trump is a Child (“His Majesty the Baby”)

I now want to turn to the second lament, related to the first: Trump is a child (and therefore, by definition, without shame). Cartoons that represent Donald Trump as everything from an excrement-covered baby threatening world stability, to a lap-child of Vladimir Putin and Steve Bannon, have appeared in newspapers around the world since Donald Trump began his presidential campaign. Some dissenters insist that “the president is not a child [because] ... children can improve. Children speak with inside voices. Children ask for help when there are things they cannot reach,” the trope of the spoiled, out-of-control child has taken hold.

Not only present in cheeky caricatures, GOP insiders and Trump staffers indulge the narrative of Trump as a child who needs managing. A cartoon of the White House as a play pen followed Republican Senator Bob Corker’s 2017 Tweet: “It’s a shame the White House has become an adult day care center” (@SenBobCorker, October 8, 2017). Also on Twitter, Political scientist Daniel Drezner has been tracking Republican politicians and GOP staffers who describe Trump as a child or toddler, using the hashtag #ToddlerinChief, and hit 671 mentions in February 2019 (@dandrezner, February 26, 2019). Tweets take the form of “I’ll believe that Trump is growing into the presidency when his staff [or allies or GOP senators] stops talking about him like a toddler” and then include an excerpt from an insider comment that laments Trump’s addiction to TV, need for structured and unstructured playtime, and so on. (Since Drezner’s project began, someone else now Tweets under @ToddlerInChief, a fake Donald Trump account). Many of the comments in Drezner’s running file do not make direct references to childhood per se, but expose to the generally difficult-to-manage, impulsive, and easily distracted nature of Trump – qualities he presumably shares with young children. This demonization through infantilization, we can presume, is intended to show Trump as immature, incapable of leading, and someone who cannot be trusted with the heady work of adult governing. It also sets the stage for his advisors taking charge, assuming the role of what one staffer described as the “Montessori teacher” who cycles him between slack and activity (Drezner 2017). His advisors become the “grown-ups” victimized by a tyrannical child.

I want to think more critically about what is going on in this portrait of Trump as an imperious child and its resonance with Freud’s account of “his majesty the baby,” which I quote in the opening epigraphs. As I note there, Freud writes: “The child shall have things better than his parents: he shall not be subject to the necessities which they have recognized as dominating life. ... [R]estrictions on his own will, shall not touch him; the laws of nature, like those of society, are to be abrogated in his favor; he is really to be the center and heart of creation, ‘His Majesty the Baby,’ as we once fancied ourselves to be.” For Freud, the birth of the child is an opportunity for parents to channel their own unmet longings into their new “creation” (Freud 1952, 406).

That is, to say, parents often position themselves as subjected to the demands of the ego-driven child who rules them, but Freud’s work suggests a more reflexive quality at work. The child becomes an agent of parental narcissism – a container for the parents’ decaying dreams for themselves. Parental fondness (for the child) and investment in its perfection creates this fixation on the child and gives it power over adults. Freud describes the “attitude of fond parents toward their children [as] a revival and reproduction of their own, long since abandoned narcissism.” He continues: “The child shall have things better than his parents” and parents “renew in [the child] the claims for privilege which were long ago given up by themselves” (Freud 1952, 406). The child is never imperious *ex nihilo* for Freud, but always because of the narcissistic condition of the parents. In other words, blaming the child for being childlike misses the point.

It is striking that the problem for Freud then is not about the naturally imperious baby who governs the adults, but about the power adults give over to the baby out of their own narcissism. When Trump said during the primary campaign that he could shoot a person on Fifth Avenue in broad daylight because his “people” (supporters, fans) are so much more loyal than the supporters of his opponents, he captures how he is a monster of his base’s creation (Flores 2016). Capturing the monster as a creation rather than beginning, a cartoon from Dubai’s *Khaleej Times* depicts “Trumpenstein,” a Frankenstein monster unleashed by the “Republican Lab.” In this frame, the blame lies with the GOP for their irresponsible creation

and then abandonment. (Eileen Hunt Botting argues that Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* to make a point about the plight of abandoned children. See Botting 2017). Trump's electorate and the GOP have given him this power; we might add that so too have capital and the law that backs it, none of which seem to expect from him basic habits of adult restraint. To extend the recurring metaphor of Trump as a child, let us consider how reading and treating Trump as such speaks to the parents' desires.

And who might these parents be and what do they desire? In the case of Trump, adults' fantasies of being children who do not have to be ruled by shame are life-giving. What fuels the Trump presidency is its ability to provide a device through which "the people" channels its own longing for unfettered speech and actions, sexual indiscretion, and other desires it feels have been unfairly regulated and censored by "political correctness," feminism, anti-racism, and so on. US voters and citizens who have supported Trump – both before and after the election – repeatedly praise him for saying what they are too afraid to say, for speaking his mind frankly and authentically. Trump being a child who does not play by the rules of "grownup" politics provides succor for his followers (read here as parents) who resent being forced to constrain their own desires. They have transferred their own resentments about adulthood into him, and therefore the insult that he is a child is misplaced; his childishness is precisely the investment, and it will never be used to undo him.

Indeed, far from an insult or something that could debilitate the Trump presidency, Trump's performance of childishness could be an explicit strategy. This would exploit that other side of childishness -- of Rousseauian innocence, natural goodness, and naiveté. By positioning himself as a political naïf who does not know or abide by the standard rules of political life, so much so that he repeatedly breaks rules of political speech and decorum, Trump burnishes his reputation as "authentic" and true. His failure to comport with the standard norms of social and political life, ostensibly secured by shame, makes him all the more attractive to those who have their own frustrated (parental) desires that can live on through Trump's self-aggrandizing imperial rule. Even when he says and does things that seem vile and

disrespectful, he can be forgiven by virtue of being childlike, which on balance is seen as better than being *too* beholden to the social rules of political and social life – social rules that many see as having alienated and ridiculed them. His own shaming of others, similarly, is legitimated by his under-development as an adult. He situates himself as outside of the economy of shame as cover for *weaponizing* (to use Haslett's term) shame against others.

Conclusion

I have sought to contextualize two laments about the rise of Donald Trump in the United States. These laments may be useful mechanisms for highlighting Trump's wrongdoings, forging solidarity among anti-Trump groups and parties, and implementing one of Saul Alinsky's rules for radicals: Ridicule your enemies (Alinsky 1989). But making the case that because Trump is shameless, the US needs to "bring shame back" could easily backfire. Similarly, painting him as a petulant and imperious child against the backdrop of sober, "grown-up" establishment politicians has also depoliticized the interlocking forces (such as capital, misogyny, and whiteness) that have given him power. In a culture that positions itself, as Lee Edelman notes, as "fighting for the children," calling a politician a child in fact celebrates where it means to oppose (Edelman 2004). Rejecting the "grown-up" world of "establishment" politics, Trump's so-called childishness represents him as blessedly naïve about politics and the very thing the Republican Party fights to protect and promote. There are potentially reactionary implications of deploying narratives of loss and regret that mourn the passing of previous eras when people were properly shame-regarding and "adult," as opposed to a childish and shameless present.

These tactics keep us unduly focused on Trump himself, and less aware of and in touch with both the forces that empower him and those who could depose him. Moreover, they give cover for those who, defending right-wing policies as natural outgrowths of common sense shame, position insurgent democratic resistance as shameless and "beyond the pale." As right-wing populist leaders, who campaign

and win on “authenticity” and “ignorance” of the corrupt rules of the political establishment, continue to win elected office around the world, their critics would do well to consider discourses of opposition that do not play into the very strategy they deploy and their supporters demand.

References

- Alinsky, Saul. 1989. *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Vintage.
- Botting, Eileen Hunt. 2017. *Mary Shelley and the Rights of the Child*. New Haven: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Burgo, Joseph. “Narcissism and Other Defenses Against Shame.” *Psychology Today*, November 12, 2012. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/shame/201211/narcissism-and-other-defenses-against-shame>
- Carroll, Ross. 2017. “Review of Democracy and the Death of Shame.” *Contemporary Political Theory* 17 (3): 1–4.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. “The First White President.” *The Atlantic*, October 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>
- Drezner, Daniel W. “White House Aides Can’t Stop Talking About President Trump Like He’s a Toddler.” *Washington Post*, August 21, 2017.
- Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Flores, Reena. “Donald Trump: I could “shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters”.” CBS News, January 23, 2016. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-i-could-shoot-somebody-and-i-wouldnt-lose-any-voters/>
- Freud, Sigmund. 1952. “On Narcissism.” In *The Major Works of Sigmund Freud*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Haslett, Adam. “Donald Trump: Shamer In Chief.” *The Nation*, October 4, 2016. <https://www.thenation.com/article/donald-trump-shamer-in-chief/>
- Ivory, Steven. 2017. “For Trump, There is No Bottom.” *EurWeb (Electronic Urban Report)*, August 17, 2017. <https://www.eurweb.com/tag/steven-ivory-for-trump-there-is-no-bottom/>
- Janara, Laura. 2002. *Democracy Growing Up: Authority, Autonomy, and Passion in Tocqueville’s Democracy in America*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Lerner, Michael. “Stop Shaming Trump Supporters.” *New York Times*, November 9, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/opinion/election-night-2016/stop-shaming-trump-supporters>
- Morefield, Jeanne. 2014. *Empires Without Imperialism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- New York Times*. 2017. “Republican Guide to Presidential Etiquette.” October 8, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/10/08/opinion/editorials/republican-etiquette-guide.html>
- Parsons, Lynn Hudson. 1973. “‘A Perpetual Harrow upon My Feelings’: John Quincy Adams and the American Indian.” *The New England Quarterly* 46 (3): 339–379.
- Parsons, Lynn Hudson 2011. *The Birth of Modern Politics: Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, and the Election of 1828*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Petri, Alexandra. 2017. “Donald Trump is not a child. He is something much worse.” *Chicago Tribune*, May 17, 2017. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-donald-trump-child-president-20170517-story.html>
- Plato. 2009. *Protagoras*. Translated by C.C.W. Taylor. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Remini, Robert V. 2002. *John Quincy Adams*. New York: Times Books.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1979. *Emile*. Translated by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books.
- Saxonhouse, Arlene W. 2006. *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Charles. “Yes, There is Shame in Not Knowing.” *Boston Globe*, December 19, 2016. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2016/12/19/yes-there-shame-not-knowing/FgR-fohT2d17oKRle9LbiSM/story.html>
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. 1959. *Journey to America*. Translated by J.P. Mayer. New Haven: Yale.

**Donald Trump is not a Shameless Toddler: The Problems
Psychological Analyses of the 45th US President**

Jill Locke

Krisis 2019, Issue 1

45

www.krisis.eu

Tocqueville, Alexis de. 2003. *Democracy in America*. Translated by Gerald Bevan. New York: Penguin.

Warner, Michael. 1999. *The Trouble with Normal*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Biography

Jill Locke

Jill Locke is professor of political science and director of the gender, women, and sexuality studies programme at Gustavus Adolphus College (Minnesota, USA). She is the author of *Democracy and the Death of Shame* (Cambridge, 2016) and has lectured about shame and shamelessness as they relate to democracy throughout North America and Europe.